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STATE FOR NEA/I AND PRM/A

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TAGS: [IZ](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: EXTENDING SPECIAL HUMANITARIAN CONCERN REFUGEE
STATUS TO NON-MUSLIM RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

REF: A. 2006 BAGHDAD 573

- [1](#)B. 2006 BAGHDAD 1924
- [1](#)C. 2006 BAGHDAD 2519
- [1](#)D. BAGHDAD 767
- [1](#)E. BAGHDAD 881
- [1](#)F. BAGHDAD 1190
- [1](#)G. BAGHDAD 1425
- [1](#)H. BAGHDAD 2010
- [1](#)I. VATICAN 99

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Post recommends extending "Priority Two" (P2, groups of special humanitarian concern) refugee processing category to all non-Muslim religious minorities from Iraq. Post assessment, supported by reftels, is that members of religious minorities in Iraq are particularly vulnerable to serious harm. Unlike Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, or Kurds, religious minorities -- such as Sabeen-Mandaeans, Yezidis, Baha'i, and Chaldo-Assyrian Christians -- lack safe havens where they can retain their religious identity free from credible fear of persecution. Even in areas where these minorities are tolerated, such as Kurdistan or Ninewa, they are often treated as means or impediments to the aspirations of larger groups competing for political supremacy in contested areas.

[1](#)2. (C) Despite the measures to reduce the level of ethno-sectarian violence in Baghdad and the rest of Iraq, religious minorities continue to report instances of harassment and violence in Baghdad, Mosul, and disputed territories. Targeting of religious minorities is motivated by both religious prejudice and opportunistic criminal exploitation of their vulnerability as unarmed groups. While Post has no reports of official or large-scale campaigns to drive all religious minorities out of Iraq, criminal gangs claiming adherence to Islamic fundamentalism are displacing, kidnapping for ransom, extorting, and pressuring the conversion of members of religious minorities. The Government of Iraq does not condone these actions, but has not been able to stop them, leaving many minorities fearful for their safety and skeptical about the GOI's capacity to protect their rights. As a result, members of religious minorities continue to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Non-Muslim religious minorities constitute about 3% to 5% of all Iraqis but up until recently represented 40% of all Iraqi refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Syria. Currently, it is estimated that non-Muslim religious minorities comprise about 20% of the all Iraqi refugees. The proportional overrepresentation of members of non-Muslim religious minorities among the Iraqi refugee population supports their claims about the risks they face in Iraq.

13. (C) Post understands that many Sunni and Shia Arabs have also sought refuge in neighboring countries due to credible fears of persecution. We encourage the Department to continue to ensure that the US Refugee Admissions Program retains the capacity -- in terms of the total number of Iraqi refugees that will be processed and may be admitted to the US -- to include members from all groups represented in the Iraqi refugee population, and to pay particular attention to the most vulnerable cases. Many of the latter will come from religious minorities. Post therefore supports measures -- such as P2 designation -- to streamline their processing and the possibility of resettlement as a durable solution to their plight.

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